

**Abstract**—The Moslem population of the world is estimated at 984 million persons in 1988; almost one-quarter of the world population may be Moslem after the turn of the century if current high levels of fertility persist. There are more Moslems today in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa than in the Arab Middle East where Islam arose in the 7th century A.D.

The Islamic nations are the fastest growing population group worldwide—through natural increase, not conversion—although Islam is the only major monotheistic religion not to forbid contraception. Almost all Islamic countries have very high levels of fertility, mortality, and natural increase even though there is wide diversity among them, stretching as they do from Albania in Europe to the world's fifth most populous nation, Indonesia in Southeast Asia, and ranging from the wealth of the oil-producing states in the Gulf and Brunei to the poverty in densely-populated Bangladesh and drought-stricken countries in Africa.

The author argues that it is not Islam per se that causes these demographic trends, but the generally early stage of development and the low status of women in traditional, patriarchal societies.

There are 40 countries in which 50-100 percent of the population is Moslem; 7 in which 25-49 percent are Moslem; and 9 countries with over 2 million Moslems each but where they do not total 25 percent of the population. These include China, India, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia, countries where ethnic and religious divisions often create political problems.

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# *The Demography of Islamic Nations*

By John R. Weeks

	Page
Introduction .....	5
What is Islam? .....	6
Social Relationships in Islam .....	7
Defining Islamic Nations .....	8
The Demographic Distinctiveness of Islamic Nations .....	12
Fertility in Islamic Nations .....	15
Levels and Trends .....	15
Explanations of Fertility Levels .....	18
The Status of Women .....	25
Mortality in Islamic Nations .....	29
Migration in Islamic Nations .....	32
Guest-Worker: International Migration .....	32
Urbanization .....	33
Refugees in Islamic Nations .....	34
Age and Sex Composition of Islamic Societies .....	35
Population Growth and Economic Development .....	37
Population Policies in Islamic Nations .....	41
Conclusion .....	45
References .....	48
Discussion Points .....	54
Boxes	
Box 1. Moslems as Minorities in the Soviet Union and China .....	10
Box 2. Can We Estimate the Size of the Moslem Population in the United States? .....	52
Tables	
1. Islamic Nations, 1988 .....	8
2. Islamic Nations by Geographic Region .....	12
3. Demographic Characteristics of Moslem Nations, Compared With Other Nations of the World, 1988. ....	13
4. Total Fertility Rate of Islamic Nations Compared With Other Developing Nations in the Same Geographic Region .....	15
5. Proximate Determinants of Fertility in Islamic and Non-Islamic Nations .....	21
6. Early Marriage and Contraceptive Use in Islamic Nations Compared With Other Developing Nations in the Same Geographic Region .....	22
7. Indicators of the Status of Women in Islamic and Non-Islamic Nations .....	26
8. Indicators of the Status of Women in Islamic Nations Compared With Other Developing Nations in the Same Geographic Region .....	27
9. Status of Women Scores in Islamic Nations Compared With Other Developing Nations in the Same Geographic Region .....	28
10. Mortality Indicators by Income Level for Islamic and Non-Islamic Nations .....	30
11. Life Expectancy in Islamic Nations Compared With Other Developing Nations in the Same Geographic Region .....	31
12. Percent of the Population Living in Urban Places, Islamic Nations Compared With Other Developing Nations in the Same Geographic Region .....	34
13. Per Person Income of Islamic Nations Compared With Other Developing Nations in the Same Geographic Region .....	39
14. Average Annual Rate of Growth of Per Person Income of Islamic Nations Compared With Other Developing Nations in the Same Geographic Region, 1965-86 .....	40

15. Official Government View of the National Rate of Population Growth, Islamic and Non-Islamic Nations .....	42
16. Rate of Population Growth and Size of Population, According to Government View of Rate of Population Growth, Islamic and Non-Islamic Nations .....	43
17. Family Planning Program Effort Score, According to Government View of Rate of Population Growth, Islamic and Non-Islamic Nations .....	45

Figures

1. Islamic Nations, 1988 .....	4
2. The Demography of Islamic Nations in Comparison to Other Developing Countries and the Demographic Transition in the U.S. ....	14
3. Total Fertility Rates in Islamic Nations, 1988 .....	16
4. Changes in Fertility Between 1955/60 and 1988 in Islamic and Non-Islamic Nations .....	17
5. The Status of Women .....	23
6. Life Expectancy at Birth in Islamic Nations, 1988 .....	29
7. Age Structure, World Moslem Population, 1980s .....	35
8. Age Structure Comparison: Islamic Nation (Pakistan), Non-Islamic Developing Nation (South Korea), and Developed Nation (Sweden), 1985 .....	36
9. Projected World Moslem Population, 1988 to 2050 .....	38

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